



EPA to host waste pits meeting in Galveston

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By Christopher James 0 comments

The Environmental Protection Agency is hosting a public meeting in Galveston Tuesday, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

EPA officials will provide information about the San Jacinto waste pits at the Galveston County Courthouse, 722 Moody Ave.

The Galveston Maritime Business Association, a group with financial ties to the corporate entities responsible for the Superfund site on Baytown's border, requested the meeting.

Last month, attorneys for Waste Management of Texas, Waste Management Inc., and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp. revealed in court that those companies provided financial support to campaigns against removing the waste, saying in court documents that the companies "have been involved in some community engagement efforts relating to the ongoing remediation of the waste pits. The activities include significant participation by retained third parties and involvement in KeepItCapped.org, the San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution and the Galveston Maritime Business Association."

All three of these organizations oppose the EPA's plan to remove about 212,000 cubic yards of material contaminated with cancer-causing dioxin, instead supporting a permanent cap, a much cheaper solution.

The Galveston Maritime Business Association attended an EPA meeting in Highlands before any affiliation between parties was disclosed, addressing the agency with inaccurate information.

During that meeting, several members of the GMBA referred to the EPA's removal action as "dredging." The EPA plan is to instead remove about 212,00 cubic yards of material contaminated with dioxin using a cofferdam — removing contaminants in the dry using engineering controls to prevent chemicals from being released.

For years, environmental activists and the responsible parties have argued about how the EPA should move forward to clean up the toxins. The main options emerged: completely remove the toxic materials using a cofferdam, or leave them and place a permanent cap over the pits.

But not long after Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston area, including Highlands, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt made a surprise visit to the pits and surveyed the site. At the same time, EPA divers discovered dioxin levels at 70,000 parts per trillion, which is 2,300 times the level set to trigger cleanup.

Days later, he ordered the two corporations spend \$115 million to excavate the contamination rather than leaving it covered.

Environmental activists applauded Pruitt's decision, while the companies argued the move could expose more people to the chemicals.

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